

DRINKING VESSEL HOLDER FOR USE WITH A FOOD SERVING UTENSIL

TECHNICAL FIELD AND BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

This application claims priority from and incorporates by reference herein in its entirety U.S. provisional Pat. application Ser. No. 60/422,283, filed Oct. 30, 2002, entitled
5 DRINKING VESSEL HOLDER FOR USE WITH A FOOD SERVING UTENSIL (Attorney Docket JET02 P-100).

The present invention relates to a holder for drinking vessels, such as stemware, barware, cups, mugs, or the like. More particularly, the present invention relates to a drinking vessel holder that is particularly suitable for use and in combination with a food
10 serving utensil, such as a plate, tray, or the like.

When partaking in food and drinks at a gathering, guests often find it difficult to greet people with a hand shake, since both hands are typically occupied—with one hand holding a plate for food and the other hand holding the drink. Where tables are plentiful and accessible, attendees can park their plate or drink to greet people. But when the available
15 horizontal surface is limited, some guests find themselves trying to handle both the plate and the glass in one hand in attempt to shake hands. However, this jostling can lead dropped food, or even worse dropped plates or glasses. Other guests simply forgo the formalities. In addition, when food is served in buffet style unless ample space is provided between the trays or dishes of food guests often find it difficult to serve themselves food when they have a
20 drink in hand.

Consequently, there is a need for a serving device that will permit people to hold both their food and their drink with one hand and preferably in a manner that is stable.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Accordingly, the present invention provides the drinking vessel holder for a
25 food serving utensil, which includes a body having a generally upper surface, a bottom surface spaced from the upper surface, and a perimeter. The body includes a raised rim around at least a portion of the perimeter of the body and a transverse slot, which extends into the body from the perimeter of the body to a medial portion of the body. The slot is adapted for receiving a stem of a stemware drinking vessel, with the upper generally planar surface
30 adapted for supporting a base of a cup-shaped drinking vessel or base of the hollow portion

of the stemware drinking vessel. In addition, the body is adapted for being mounted on a food serving utensil wherein the drinking vessel holder can adapt the food serving utensil to hold either stemware drinking vessel or a cup-shaped drinking vessel.

In one aspect, the food serving utensil comprises a plate member. For example, the plate member may comprise a round plate member.

In other aspects, the drinking vessel holder and the plate member are integrally formed to thereby form a unitary member. In a further aspect, the plate member includes a perimeter portion and a raised rib, which extends around at least a portion of the perimeter portion of the plate member. Further, the raised rib of the plate member preferably merges into the raised rib of the body wherein the raised rib of the plate member and the raised rib of the body form a perimeter raised rib around the unitary member.

In other aspects, the unitary member may be formed from a plastic material, a ceramic material, glass, wood, or a composite material or the like.

According to yet other aspects, the body includes downwardly depending webs at the slot to thereby reinforce the body of the slot.

It can be appreciated that the drinking vessel holder of the present invention facilitates the holding of a drinking vessel and, further, enables a person to hold a drinking vessel and food in the same hand while leaving the other hand free to serve themselves food or to greet people.

These and other objects, advantages, purposes, and features of the invention will become more apparent from the study of the following description taken in conjunction with the drawings.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of the drinking vessel holder adapted for use with a food service utensil of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a top plan view of the drinking vessel holder and food serving utensil of FIG. 1;

FIG. 3 is a bottom plan view of the drinking vessel holder and food serving utensil of FIG. 1;

FIG. 4 is a left side elevation view of the drinking vessel holder and food serving utensil of FIG. 1;

FIG. 5 is a right side elevation view of the drinking vessel holder and food serving utensil of FIG. 1; and

FIG. 6 is a front elevation view of the drinking vessel holder and food serving utensil of FIG. 1.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Referring to FIG. 1, the numeral 10 generally designates a food/drink holder for a drinking vessel and food of the present invention. Holder 10 includes a food serving utensil 12 for holding food and a drinking vessel holder 14 for holding a drinking vessel, such as a stemware drinking vessel, such as a wine glass, a cup-shaped drinking vessel, such as barware, or the like. In this manner, holder 10 permits a person to simultaneously hold a drink and food using a single hand, which facilitates socializing and self serving of food or drinks at a reception, party or the like.

Food serving utensil 12 comprises a plate member 16 with an upwardly extending rib 18 that extends around at least a portion of plate member's perimeter 16a. In the illustrated embodiment, rib 18 has a channel-shaped cross-section (FIG. 3A), which defines an inner sloping side wall 20 and an outer sloping side wall 22. Walls 20 and 22 define therebetween a recess 24, which extends around at least a portion of perimeter 16a of plate member 16. In preferred form, sloping side wall 20 of rib 18 extends upwardly from plate member 16 with lower edge 22a of side wall 22 being generally coplanar with lower surface 16b of plate member 16 so that when holder 10 is resting on a generally horizontal support surface, the contact surface provided by the combination of the lower edge of side wall 22 and of lower surface 16a will provide stability to holder 10.

Drinking vessel holder 14 is of similar construction to food serving utensil 12 and includes a plate member 26 and a rib 28 that extends at least partially around perimeter 26a of plate member 26, similar to rib 18. Plate member 26 further includes an elongate slot 30, which extends into plate member 26 from outer perimeter 32 defined by rib 28 and is defined between web walls 31 and 33, which provide local stiffness to and reduce the local stresses of plate member 26 at slot 30. Optionally, elongate slot 30 includes an enlarged distal end 30a, such as a circular opening, which may provide, depending on the stem of the glass, a lateral retaining function as well as the vertical retaining function provided by upper surface 26b of plate member 26. The center of the rounded distal end 30a of the elongate slot is preferably located at the medial portion of the plate and, further, includes a center that is

generally coaxial with the center of the plate member 26. As will be understood by those skilled in the art, when a stemware drinking vessel stem is passed through elongate slot 30 and positioned in enlarged opening 30a, the hollow portion of the stemware may rest on upper surface 26a. When the connection between the stem and the hollow portion of the stemware has an enlarged transition, which is dimensioned greater than the lateral dimension L1 of elongate slot 30 but no greater than the lateral dimension L2 of enlarged opening 30a then after the stem of the stemware is passed through slot 30 and the stemware is lowered such that its hollow portion rests on plate member 26, the stemware may be retained laterally by the shoulders 30b and 30c of elongate slot while the bottom surface of the hollow portion of the stemware may rest on upper surface 26a of plate member 26. As will be understood by those skilled in the art, the greater the span or footprint of the contact between drinking vessel holder 14 and the stemware, the greater the stability of the stemware in holder 10.

Furthermore, upper surface 26a may also provide support for the bottom surface of a cup-shape drinking vessel, such as a mug, barware, cup, or the like. In addition, rib 28, which extends above upper surface 26a of plate member 26 provides a lateral restraint for the drinking vessel when it is rested on upper surface 26a of plate member 26.

Referring to FIG. 2, rib 28 and rib 18 may be formed such that their respective outer sides 34 and 22 are substantially contiguous to form a substantially contiguous outer perimeter wall for holder 10. Optionally, the juncture of outer wall 34 and outer wall 22 includes a notched portion 36 that enables a person holding holder 10 to rest the holder on the person's index finger, which provides for added to stability to the holder when held by a person. In addition, holder may include a pas 36a, for example a pad made from a cushioning material, such as a silicone material or the like, at notched portion 36 to better distribute the weight of holder 10 across the holder's finger and, further, to provide a cushion.

As best seen in FIGS. 1 and 2, ribs 18 and 28 merge to form a dividing rib 38 which includes side walls 40 and 42, with sidewall 40 facing inner sidewall 20 of rib 18 and sidewall 42 facing inner sidewall 44 of rib 28. In this manner, rib 38 divides plate member 16 from plate member 26. In addition similar to plate member 16, lower surface 26c of plate member 26 is preferably coplanar with lower edge 34a of outer wall 34 and also with lower edge 22a of wall 22 and lower surface 16b of plate member 16.

As best seen in FIG. 3, notch 36 generally aligns with the recess 46 formed between side walls 40 and 42 of rib 38 so that the finger, such as the index finger of the

person holding holder 10 may be inserted between side walls 40 and 42 to provide further stability for the holder 10.

In the illustrated embodiment, food serving utensil 12 and drinking vessel holder 14 are formed as a unitary member and may be formed, for example by molding, including injection molding or press molding or the like. Holder 10 may be formed from a plastic material, including a reinforced plastic material, glass, a ceramic, paper, stoneware, or wood, or the like. In forming holder 10, it is preferably that the transitions between the ribs and the plate sections and the transitions between the merging ribs comprise rounded or curved transitions to minimize the local stresses in holder 10. In some applications, high friction material may be provided on one or more surfaces of the holder to increase stability and/or to enhance the holding function of the holder, for example, on upper surface 26a of plate member 26 or along the downwardly extending webs of elongate slot 30.

It should be understood further that the thickness of the plate members and the side walls forming the ribs may be increased or decreased as desired, depending in the material used to form holder and also depending on the style desired. In addition, the height of the ribs may be varied. Moreover, holder 10 may be formed with an upwardly or downwardly or level rim of the type used in conventional plates in lieu of rib 18 and/or 28. Furthermore, the elongated slot may include a rounded or other shape distal end with a lateral dimensioned L2 approximately equal to L1.

While several forms of the invention have been shown and described, other forms will now be apparent to those skilled in the art. For example, drinking vessel holder 14 may be separately formed and provided with means for attachment to a food serving utensil, such as a conventional plate. Although both plate members are illustrated with round or circular configurations, one or both plate members may have different shapes, such as a multi-sided shape, including square or triangular. Also the end of elongate slot 30 may comprise a multi-sided shaped end as well. Other modifications include providing reinforcing ribs at the respective lower surfaces of the plate members or between the sidewalls of the respective ribs to thereby reduce the local stresses in holder 10. Also the respective side walls of the ribs may be substantially orthogonal to the upper surface of the plate members. Therefore, it will be understood that the embodiments shown in the drawings and described above are merely for illustrative purposes, and are not intended to limit the

scope of the invention which is defined by the claims which follow as interpreted under the principles of patent law including the doctrine of equivalents.